

Walter George Dew and John Owen Cooper

By Pat Saunders

These two men were connected in that they were the father and step-father of Walter (Wally) Dew. Wally was born at 37 Tower Street on 24 February 1913 and died aged 85 in 1998 at 42 Adelaide Road Chichester. He kept various things that represented changes in his life. Some 500 items were left by Wally to the Chichester District Museum which in 1999 was in little London and is now The Novium in Tower Street. Some of the items like letters have been transferred to the Records Office.

Walter George Dew was born in 1889 in Chichester. His parents were William and Elizabeth Dew who in 1891 were living in Victoria Road, Oving, Chichester^{4e}. The family had living with them William's younger brother Thomas who doesn't appear to have married. Thomas was still with the family in 1901 when Elizabeth was head of the household and described as a widow^{4d}. The brothers William and Thomas were originally from Ansty in Wiltshire and probably moved around looking for agricultural work before settling in the Chichester area.

Similarly John Owen Cooper came from a humble agricultural labouring family at Partridge Green near Horsham. He was born in 1890 to Adrian and Hannah Cooper³. Both Walter George and John were the youngest members of their respective families. By 1911 Walter George Dew was lodging in Whyke Lane Chichester with William and Margaret Lamberth and was working as a postman^{4c}; whereas in 1911 John Owen Cooper is listed as a private in the 1st Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment in India (Piece 34987)^{5b}. It has not been possible to access many records relating to John Owen Cooper. It is quite likely he served in the military in the Second World War.

For Walter George Dew in "Attestation of Short Service"^{4b} shows he enlisted on 4 January 1915 in the 13th Battalion (Southdown or Lowther's Lambs¹) Royal Sussex Regiment aged 26 and was a married man. He was discharged 21 September 1917 under Paragraph 392 XVI. (Kings Regulations) aged 28 described as sick and had served overseas. He was awarded the Silver War Badge. Walter George was later admitted the Royal West Sussex Hospital in Broyle Road Chichester. He died on Dixon Ward following an unsuccessful operation on 21 February 1919. His will made in 1915, and probate^{4g} for an estate valued at £130-3s-9d was granted to Annie May Violet, described as wife of John Owen Cooper. Mrs Dew and John Cooper had married on 1 January 1920⁶.

It is probable that Walter George Dew and John Owen Cooper also shared allegiance to the Methodist movement, it was certainly very important to Wally during his life. As John Owen Cooper had been in the 1st Battalion in 1911 he may have stayed where it was stationed in India. Walter George Dew being in the 13th Battalion would have gone to France in March 1916 embarking on three trains from Witley Camp to Southampton where 860 boarded on SS 'Viper' and 120 on SS 'Australind'. The next day they disembarked at Harve. They stayed only briefly in billets before going to the front line to see action for a few days. Then back to another billet, constantly being moved around. The ever-present danger from the heavy

guns, bombs from overhead planes and whizz bangs are referred to in the Battalion's diary² in a dispassionate matter-of-fact way. Even when in billets there was training to be undertaken. Kit and feet inspections were carried out. The men had baths as and when they could get them. On the 4 August 1916 the diary has a short entry "2nd Anniversary of declaration of war. Short services held". In between times there were trenches that needed repairing, affected as much by the weather as by hostile action from the enemy.

Between 19 September and 3 October 1916 the 13th Battalion were posted to Redan Ridge (part of the Battle of the Somme) having relieved the 25th Royal Fusiliers. They were back there on 13 October to relieve the 12th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment. From 10 to 12 October the 13th Battalion were at ENGLEBELMER WOOD where on the 11th a "Canteen started and proved a great success". On the 1 November the 13th Battalion moved to billets at PIONEER ROAD. A new draft of 135 O.R. (other ranks) arrived for the most part from the 5th and 9th Battalions of the Royal Sussex Regiment and were described as a "very satisfactory lot of men". Hostilities continued despite the worsening weather and by the middle of November 1916 it was very cold with hard frosts at night. Between 17th and 18 November the 13th Battalion travelled from DOULLENS to HOPOUTRE. It was described as a very cold journey with a small fall of snow during the night. During December the 13th Battalion was in "L" CAMP POPERINGHE where training was continued. On the 9th there were baths available at COUTHOVE and in the evening a battalion concert was held in the recreation hut and was very much appreciated.

In the evening of 11 December 1916 the 13th Battalion travelled by train to Ypres and were met by guides from the 16th Welsh who led them to CANAL BANK dugouts. The following day the 13th Battalion relieved the 17th Royal Welsh Fusiliers in the TURCO FARM Sector. Conditions in the trenches were very bad, the heavy rain having waterlogged the communication trenches and rendered drainage difficult. At this time the commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel F.G.W. Draffen was awarded the DSO the award created great satisfaction in the battalion. A few months later he was transferred on to a course at Aldershot. Ypres was a more difficult environment the town being situated in very flat country easily targeted by the Germans. Much of the soldiers work like wiring, carrying out repairs, moving men and equipment was carried out under cover of darkness.

On 25 December the 13th Battalion was at "G" CAMP where "every effort was made to provide a suitable meal for the men on Christmas Day and the Christmas dinner was apparently a great success. Between 26th to 29 December the 13th Battalion underwent training and were then back at the front. During January approaches to the front line were more hazardous; apart from the bad state of the trenches the German snipers were increasingly active. The 13th Battalion also received new officers transferred from other battalions within the regiment. On 17 January 1917 2nd Lieutenant V S Cox and 2nd Lieutenant C W Embleton from the 3rd Battalion posted to C and D companies respectively. Then on 22 January Captain F L du Molin reported for duty and was posted to C Company. This

officer was a regular soldier of seven-and-a-half years service and came from the 1st Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment.

The 13th Battalion remained in the Ypres area in 1917 following a pattern being either at the front or in camp. At the beginning of March the 13th Battalion were either at OBSERVATORY RIDGE SECTOR or at ST. LAWRENCE CAMP. On 9 March when the 13th Battalion went to relieve the 4/5th Black Watch an extra march to Observatory ridge Sector was needed as the railway line from Ypres had been shelled in several places. On 12 March the enemy was active in the early morning with rifle grenades and egg bombs. In the afternoon the allies heavy Trench Mortars registered producing a relation from the enemy "minnies". It needed working parties in the night to repair the damage. The next day the 13th Battalion were in reserve then to KRUISSTAAT for working parties. Towards the end of March more recreational activities were incorporated to training when in billets.

On 3 April a "snow blizzard raged for several hours and was lying 9-12 ins deep in parts. Later this gave place to brilliant sunshine and the snow melted rapidly causing considerable amount of water in the trenches and demanded a lot of work on the trenches". 8 April was Easter Sunday and the 13th Battalion was at St Lawrence Camp and attended Church Parade where the services were conducted by Rev'd Captain Frossard. The weather continued cold well in to April, although on 29 April an entry states "Return of winter clothing". In May the 13th Battalion moved to BOUVELINGHAM to spend the month training. Then June was similar activity to that in April at Canal Bank, digging trenches and work parties at night.

On 24 June a Church Parade was held for the Battalion by the Rev'd W M Murray FC and the diary notes "The total casualties since June 2nd are 1 Officer died of wounds, 1 Officer wounded, eleven other ranks killed, six other ranks who died of wounds and eighty-five wounded". Early July saw training involving the use of model trenches that had been dug two feet deep, but were to familiarise troops to the lie of the land for when a major assault took place at the end of July which resulted in the consolidation of the line at ST. JULIEN and pushed it forward by 150 yards. For 16th to 17 July the men were at "Z" Camp HOULLE which was "partially occupied by 5th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment and this was the first time they'd met with 13th Battalion since the Battle of the Somme"

After 3 August the 13th Battalion left Canal Bank and on the 4th moved from Ypres to POERINGHE and then by route march to SCHOOL CAMP where they stayed until 8 August when the Battalion was reorganised and refitted. Later in August they were moved to the BOIS CONFLUENT. However by this time Walter George Dew may not have been for active service. He may have been wounded earlier. On 4th July 2nd Lieutenant W J Barnes having been transferred to England as sick was struck off the strength as dated 16.6.17. From Ypres a number of casualties were initially dealt with by the 2nd CANADIAN C.C.S. The diary doesn't often mention the names of other ranks unless it related to an exceptional situation. The preceding descriptions are an assumption of what Walter

George Dew most likely experienced while in uniform. None of this though was communicated home through letters^{7,8}. One letter that Walter George Dew wrote is as follows;

“My Dear Little Sonny and Maisee

Daddy is writing to you dears hoping you enjoyed yourself with Daddy and Miss Mummy and Siser for daddy for dear hours of XXXXXXXXXXXX to you and Siser dear God Bless you both dear from your loving

Daddy

To my dears

XXXXXXXXXX”

Another communication is a postcard on which has been printed an illustrated poem “To My Dear Wife”, “The Soldier’s Dream of Home” which is signed simply ‘From Daddy’

Walter George’s wife Annie May Violet was the daughter of Charles and Annie Budd who lived at 37 Tower Street. The family probably spent a lot of time at this address since they only lived a few doors away at No. 20. Wally’s maternal grandparents were supportive of the family after Walter George’s death. Wally’s childhood was probably unexceptional, he first attended Gordon School in North Street, Chichester then St. Margaret’s at 8 North Pallant, Chichester. From the mid-1930s to 1939 he worked at Prior’s the woolstaplers in Tower Street. Here he had the opportunity to learn to drive motor vehicles. John Owen Cooper lived to be 80 and died 21 July 1970^{5a}.

It has been interesting to compile this case study since in 2011 I was helping at the old museum in Little London to pack things ready to be moved to the new Novium in Tower Street. I saw some of the papers and artefacts that Wally Dew had bequeathed to the museum. However there wasn’t sufficient time to read through everything. I had initially thought to write about my uncle, Trevor Weston as I’d looked out some photographs of him in uniform but he served in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and originally came from Chester. He’d never said about his wartime experiences. That generation just didn’t talk about that sort of thing. Reading the Battalion Diary gave me some idea of what these men had gone through.

References

Book

1 "Sussex in the First World War" Edited by Keith Grieves (Sussex Record Society 84, pub 2004)

Original record

2 RSR Ms 7/25 Official War Diary 5 March 1916-14 August 1918, at the Records Office, Chichester

3 Microfilm Census Partridge Green, Horsham, 1891

Online Records at Ancestry.com

4 search on "Walter George Dew, Chichester, b 1889"

(a) Matching Person (from family tree) Rawlinson Family Tree; the parents were William Dew (1842-1896) and Elizabeth Jane Reynolds (1848-1902)

(b) British Army WW1 Pension Records 1914-1920; gives "Attestation of Short Service 1915 in Royal Sussex Regiment Reg. No 3087

(c) 1911 Census, boarder at 91 Whyke Lane Chichester, single, Postman, household of William & Margaret Lamberth

(d) 1901 Census age 12 at home with mother, Oving, Chichester

(e) 1891 Census age 2 at home with both parents

(f) Marriage April 1912 to Annie M V Budd

(g) Probate of Will,

(h) Awards – War Badge "British Army WW1 Medal Rolls Index cards 1914-1920

5 search on "John Owen Cooper, Chichester b 1890,"

(a) Death Sept. 1970, Chichester, birth 8 Nov. 1889

(b) 1911 Census, born Partridge Green Horsham Sussex b c 1889 1st Royal Sussex Regiment in India, rank Private

6 (microfilm) "Chichester Observer" 7 January 1920, Marriage

The Novium

7 Acc 8510 card

8 Acc 8511 letter

9 Acc 8508 kitbag belonging to J. Cooper

Acknowledgement

My thanks to The Novium for allowing me to look through their office files relating to the Wally Dew bequest.